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INVESTING IN PEOPLE

(Health)

EDITORIALS

Help kids survive

**(Source: The Buffalo News Online – 5/14/08
<http://www.buffalonews.com/149/story/346327.html>)**

A trouble-plagued world needs better aid programs for children

Today, 27,000 children under the age of 5 around the world will die from preventable or treatable causes, such as pneumonia, diarrhea and newborn complications.

Of those, 11,000 deaths will occur in babies not even a month old.

And that repeats, seven days a week, all year long. That's the reason there is an urgent need for congressional action that includes the Global Child Survival Act, which could save children and infants and renew American leadership in childhood health programs for developing countries.

Introduced in the House by Reps. Betty McCollum, D.- Minn., and Chris Shays, R.- Conn., and in the Senate by Sens. Christopher Dodd, D.-Conn., and Gordon Smith, R.-Ore., this is a bipartisan bill backed by more than 100 members of Congress.

According to former Sen. Bill Frist of Tennessee, a heart and lung transplant surgeon, the legislation could not only save the lives of millions of children and infants, but also ensure greater coordination and accountability in aid programs.

Most sick babies and children in poor countries die from causes that do not require doctors or hospitals. Yet health systems in many developing countries devote

significant resources to hospital-based care, often limiting the resources that are available for basic, preventative and curative care.

Closing the gap and saving lives also requires a global effort to boost the number of health workers, specifically to those communities that need it most. To paraphrase Frist, mothers everywhere should have the chance to see their babies survive to age 5.

Most of these young lives can be saved with more support for basic nutrition and simple health measures such as antibiotics, immunizations and skilled care at birth. Such health measures are not reaching all mothers and children, especially the poorest, according to the ninth annual “State of the World’s Mothers” report, in which the U. S.-based global independent humanitarian organization Save the Children examined how well countries are doing in providing children with basic health measures.

The group examined 55 developing countries, where 83 percent of child deaths occur, and looked at how well the world is doing in reaching children under age 5 with basic health care.

The group’s analysis found that more than 200 million children under age 5 worldwide do not receive basic health care. In 30 of the 55 countries analyzed, less than half of all children are receiving basic care. In bottom-ranked Ethiopia, more than four out of five children have yet to be reached with very basic services.

On the positive side, the report found some countries are doing a better job than others in reaching children with basic health care: the Philippines, Peru, South Africa, Indonesia and Turkmenistan. Taking a closer look at top-ranked Philippines and bottom-ranked Ethiopia, the group found the Philippines has nearly cut its child death rate in half since 1990.

The country’s health ministries, with support from USAID, launched a number of health initiatives in 1989, concluding a major push to increase access to oral rehydration therapy to treat diarrhea. Today, more than 75 percent of Filipino children with diarrhea receive that lifesaving therapy, compared with 15 percent of Ethiopian children.

Save the Children focused mainly on countries where children are most likely to die — 99 percent of the childhood deaths occurred in the developing world. But in developed countries like the United States, the poorest, most marginalized children often suffer from inadequate health care and early death. American Indians and Alaskan native infants are nearly 50 percent more likely to die than white infants, and African-Americans are 2.4 times more likely to die than white infants.

Those are deplorable figures anywhere, but are especially tragic in a country such as ours with greater resources. Taking care of the home-front is as important as reaching out to people in parts of the world where disparities are sharpest.